

Sinclair Broadcast Group's recent unilateral decision to air (first) "Stolen Honor" and (lately) a purported "news show" including 3/4 of that anti-Kerry smear piece (which may be libelous to boot) illustrate the dangers caused by media consolidation not only to localism but now to our election process.

Sinclair, like all broadcast media, uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, the definition of "public interest" is seriously skewed. First, they substitute centrally produced news programming for local news programming; second, the 'news' and the programming tend (as here) to strongly reflect what's good for the corporation's bottom line and/or the owner's politics. Those two factors predominate over their definition of "public interest" with the result that the "public interest" is ill served.

It's more important that "public interest" serve the ends of democracy: that we see real people from our own communities; that we see more substantive news about issues that matter; that 'news' programming be held to standards of truth and fairness.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. The FCC should require broadcasters to promulgate a description of the renewal process & deadlines, public interest requirement, & comment process in each applicable local market; and to solicit comments during a reasonable period before the renewal date, which comments should be required to be sent unaltered to the FCC. If this is currently required under the regulations, it is woefully underimplemented. Thank you.